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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the relationship between an eighth-grade U.S. history teacher's philosophy of teaching history and his selections of Internet-based, instructional materials to help with curriculum and instruction decisions. The objective of the research is an investigation of two reciprocal influences: (1) the teacher's philosophy of teaching history on choosing resources from the Internet; and (2) the influence that the Internet has on this teacher's philosophy of teaching history. The teacher in the study was interviewed once a week during the first year of the study. Classroom observations were conducted once every two weeks to record teacher-student interaction with the Internet during instruction. The teacher's Internet log books also were analyzed. A shift in the teaching philosophy was noted as more resources were available for classroom use and that was followed by greater experimentation with curricular and instructional decisions. (EH)

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Technology's Impact on One Teacher's Philosophy of Teaching U. S. History

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Purpose

The purpose of this study is to describe the relationship between a U. S. History teacher's philosophy of teaching history and a large data bank of resources (the internet). The research I conducted, focused particularly on a history teacher's choice of instructional materials from the internet when making curriculum and instruction decisions. The objective of the research is an investigation of two reciprocal influences: (a) the teacher's philosophy of teaching history on choosing resources from the internet, and (b) the influence that the internet has on this teacher's philosophy of teaching history.

Perspectives/Theoretical Framework

U. S. History teachers have been described as teaching history via an objectivist, "parade-of-facts" approach (Wilson, 1991). During the past two decades however, a shift in the philosophical importance of historical interpretation questions the possibility of an objective fact-based history (Novick, 1988). According to Novick, historians can be broadly classified as objectivists or relativists in their interpretation of history. An objectivist interpretation centers around a position of objectivity. This position of objectivity will in turn lead to a fact-oriented interpretation of an historical event. Conversely, relativism acknowledges the influence of a range of different perspectives has on the interpretation of a historical event. Recently historians have tended to move to a more relativistic position.

History teachers also make choices about historical content that reflect their philosophical viewpoint. Although a philosophical stance is often not explicitly articulated by teachers, its influence on the curriculum and instruction of history teachers has been documented by VanSledright (1996) and Evans (1989). As teachers face an increasingly diverse student population, the need for a diverse history curriculum becomes important. A relativistic position on history may allow for diversity in American history curricula. Seixas (1994)

noted the importance that history teachers remain abreast of influential changes in their discipline. Although the change from an objective to a relative interpretation of history is present in the discipline, teachers of U. S. History have not embraced this change with any rapidity. One reason may be the lack of resources some U. S. history teachers have at their disposal.

A history teacher's choice of resources is also influenced by their philosophical stance regarding history's role. A crucial factor that may contribute to a teacher's philosophical development of history teaching is the availability of resources when the teacher is making curriculum decisions (Loewen, 1995). Slekar (1996) interviewed two preservice teachers of elementary history and found that although past experience contributes to pedagogical philosophy, the resources available often dictated the format and content of a teacher's instruction. If a teacher exhibits a relative or objective interpretation of history, can a large resource bank influence change in their philosophy? And conversely, how does the teacher's current philosophy influence the choice of resources?

Importance of Study

Understanding a teacher's philosophy of history teaching and the affect the internet's resource bank of teaching materials has on this pedagogy, begins to map the effectiveness of implementing technology into the classroom. Knowing that the internet and technology are becoming large influences on classroom instruction, the documented choices a teacher makes when using this technology will provide for a greater understanding of the assets and pitfalls technology will play when teachers make curriculum and teaching decisions.

Population/Site of Research

The history teacher involved in this research project has at his finger tips a large resource bank (the internet). Using the above framework, one teacher was identified as a subject to

be used in this study. The participant in the study has been teaching in the city district for three years as an 8th grade U. S. history teacher. His student population is 95% African-American and 5% Latino- American. His philosophy of teaching history was determined through 3 personal interviews in which he expressed his fact-based, slightly objectivist interpretation of history, and his need for his students to value historical knowledge.

A project involving a large East-coast university, an urban school district, Apple Computer, the National Archives and the Discovery Channel Inc., has begun to address this issue. Providing teachers with the technology needed to harness the educational potential of instant access to a large resource bank (the internet), the project plans to empower teachers when making curriculum and instruction decisions. Prior to participating in this project, teachers implemented instruction with limited resources and outdated textbooks. The project includes 3 middle schools from the city district. Each of the schools' science and social studies teachers have been provided with 5 classroom computers wired directly to the internet. Teachers have freedom to use the internet when planning and implementing instruction

Methods/Data Sources

The teacher who participated in the study was interviewed once a week during the first year. The interviews consisted of questions regarding curriculum choices from the internet and their implementation into classroom instruction. These interviews were recorded on audio tape and then transcribed verbatim for future analysis. Classroom observations were conducted once every two weeks to record teacher student interaction with the internet during instruction. The teacher's internet log books (sites visited and used during instruction) were used to provide an interpretive map and to critique the content provided by the web. The data collected was then triangulated to establish patterns across the data sources. Also, using the member-checking technique, the findings were presented to the

teacher for his analysis and assessment. Using the above techniques helped in establishing the validity of the research findings.

Although this study presents its findings through the use of a single teacher, the results present the importance of individual analysis when interpreting affects on teaching pedagogy. Pedagogy in and of itself is an individual trait that is affected in unique outcomes. Using the findings of this study to relate similar circumstances may help develop an understanding of a similar situation. This study demonstrates the complexity of history teaching pedagogy. A study with an N=1 allows one to explore this change close-up and in all its subtlety and nuance.

Results

Upon the completion of the data analysis, the participant teacher demonstrated changes in relation to content choices. A relationship between his philosophy of teaching history and a large resource data bank (the internet)was established. Although the teacher in this study identified himself as slightly objectivist in his interpretations of history, the exposure to additional resources on the internet, created a curiosity which led to experimentation with his curricular and instructional decisions. The teacher began to demonstrate a shift in philosophy of teaching history. Although, slightly firm in his position regarding the teaching a fact-based objectivist history, the teacher came to express the idea that he had neglected the importance of the interpretive nature of history. A possible contributing factor, as indicated by the teacher, was the availability of new resources on the internet with their variety of points of view and differing interpretations of events.

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